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LETTER DATED 24 FEBRUARY 2000 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF UGANDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On instructions of my Government, I refer to my letter dated 3 February 2000 (S/2000/89) and I have the honour to forward to you a statement by the Government of Uganda (see annex) in response to the continued and unresearched volume of allegations (S/2000/122 of 16 February 2000) by the Democratic Republic of the Congo regarding the humanitarian situation and alleged massacres in Orientale Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Government of Uganda totally rejects the unresearched and unfounded allegations made in total disregard of the history of the region. Once again the Government of Uganda invites the authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to commit themselves to the peace process and to the efforts currently under way by the United Nations Security Council.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) SEMAKULA KIWANUKA
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative of Uganda
to the United Nations

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Annex

Statement by the Government of Uganda

It is a historical fact that the Great Lakes region has for decades been suffering from ethnic conflicts. One of the commonest forms that the conflicts take is ethnic clashes, as has been witnessed in Rwanda, Burundi, southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The frequency and intensity of these conflicts have been observed to have a direct relationship with the length of time during which people have been subjected to dictatorship, injustice, human rights abuses and other forms of bad governance. Most unfortunately, in some cases these clashes have been directly instigated or openly abetted by bad leaders.

Indeed the current bloody clashes between the Lendu and Hema ethnic groups in the Blukwa district of north-eastern Congo are taking the form of a familiar pattern arising from incitements and fuelling of ethnic hatred launched by the Government and spearheaded by President Kabila himself, who appeared on national television and radio in 1998 to incite certain ethnic groups against other groups with whom they had co-existed for centuries. These incitements have from time to time resulted in armed confrontations between groups against a background of pre-existing tensions created by colonial legacy, by economic stagnation, by population pressure, and by the weakness of State structures that normally support law and order.

The bad blood between the Lendu and the Hema can be traced back to the colonial period during which the resources of the region were unevenly distributed as part of the policy of divide and rule. As a consequence of these bad policies the minority Hema ended up with more land concessions, and greater access to education and public jobs than the majority Lendu. This situation could of course have been corrected if it had been addressed by a progressive and responsible government after independence. But 30 years of misrule perpetuated these bad administrative and economic policies and served to aggravate the situation.

According to reports received by Ugandan security agencies, armed clashes started occurring in the areas of Nyangarai, Katoto, Kunda, Fataki, Djungu and Nyoka among others in June 1999. More recently, between 6 and 9 January this year, violent clashes have taken place in seven localities, leading to the death of between 1,000 and 2,000 people. The violence was accompanied by extensive looting and by the destruction of property. The principal weapons used in the attacks were machetes and spears, as well as bows and arrows. Land disputes appear to be at the centre of the conflict.

One thing is clear: the clashes have nothing to do with the presence of Uganda People's Defence Forces in the area. While the principal weapons used by the tribesmen are bows, arrows, spear and machetes, UPDF are armed with modern weapons, which are used to counter Ugandan rebels who are trained and armed by the Sudan and who try to take advantage of the power vacuum in eastern Congo to launch attacks against Uganda. The two conflicts are distinct though they spread across the same geographical area. The tribal massacres involve

Congolese communities who are not involved in the renegade activities of Ugandan rebels and their Interahamwe allies. This can be attested to by non-governmental organizations and journalists who are operating in the region. There is therefore no truth in the claim made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that the massacres are a consequence of the presence of UPDF troops on Congolese territory.

The above-mentioned facts notwithstanding, the Government of Uganda has made some effort to try to diffuse the tensions and thereby contribute to the ending of the conflict. Last year we worked with the provincial authorities to set up a commission which was established on 30 October 1999, charged with the task of bringing the fighting to an end, working for the restoration of law and order, and holding discussions with the leaders of the conflicting groups with a view to devising ways of redressing the existing imbalances in land distribution in the area. The Government of Uganda fully recognizes that this conflict is an internal problem which can only be resolved by the Congolese people themselves. Nevertheless efforts are being made to increase the deployment of UPDF troops around the areas of conflict in order to assist provincial authorities with their efforts to establish law and order in the area. Assistance is also being given to the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie to train civilian police and to strengthen the judicial system.

The Government of Uganda wishes to state the following:

That it has never been involved in any human rights abuse on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. None of the sources which have been cited by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo about the massacres in Blukwa district have suggested this;

That it welcomes impartial investigations into the causes of these massacres;

That it is ready to cooperate with the Joint Military Commission and the United Nations in order to provide security and humanitarian relief to the affected communities;

That the long-term solution to periodic ethnic massacres in the Democratic Republic of the Congo can only be arrived at through the inter-Congolese national dialogue as provided for in the Lusaka Peace Agreement;

Finally, the Government of Uganda endorses the efforts currently being made by the Security Council to support the Joint Military Commission and the inter-Congolese national dialogue with a view to diffusing the larger conflict in the Congo of which the Lendu/Hema conflict is only a part.